Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy

Update

March 2002

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

A Message from the Nursing Policy Advisor

Barb Oke, Nursing Policy Advisor.

I am pleased to bring you this first update on the implementation of the Nova Scotia Nursing Strategy. When the Honourable Jamie Muir, Minister of Health, announced the $5 million nursing strategy in April of 2001, we made a commitment to share the positive impact it is having on nurses in our province.

The Provincial Nursing Network–a group of nurses representing employers, educators, unions, professional associations, regulatory bodies, and practising nurses–came together in 2000 to set priorities for the nursing strategy. They consulted with the nursing community and others and reviewed all available evidence to develop the four key areas of the strategy. The result is a strategy that balances the need for recruitment with the need for retention and the need for investment in practising nurses with investment in new recruits.

Over the past few months, hundreds of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and student nurses benefited directly from the strategy, whether from professional development or continuing education courses, bursaries and co-op work terms, or relocation allowances. The profiles in this newsletter show just some of the ways we're putting the strategy into practice.

During my two years as Nursing Policy Advisor, I've had the pleasure of meeting and working with many nurses. I am always impressed by their ability and willingness to analyse issues and develop solutions. In all those discussions, their commitment to quality patient care has been paramount. When Minister Muir announced the strategy, he said he believed it would help us rebuild the nursing workforce in Nova Scotia, and we have made good progress. It may take several years to see the results of some of these initiatives, and the Provincial Nursing Network is working now to make sure next year's strategy builds on our recent success.

Provincial Nursing Network

Back Row, L-R; Mary Ellen Gurnham, Capital Health; Janet Maclean, IWK Health Centre; Michelle Kucey, Nova Scotia Community College; Heather Henderson, Nova Scotia Nurses Union; Carolyn Moore, College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia; Ann Yuill, VON; Dr. Angela Gillis, St. Francis Xavier University; Shelia Scarvelli, Pictou County District Health Authority; Barb Oke, Department of Health

Front Row, L-R; Evelyn Schaller, Cape Breton District Health Authority; Heather Jewers, Guysborough Antigonish-Strait Health Authority; Martha Brown, Nova Scotia Government Employees Union; Albert MacIntyre, Practical Nurses Licensing Board; Cheryl Howell, Cumberland Health Authority

Missing from Photo: Paulette Babin, South West Nova District Health Authority; Anne Erly, Department of Health; Barbara Downe-Wamboldt, Dalhousie University; Peggy MacNeil, Long Term Care; Kathy MacNeil, Long Term Care; Donna Denney, College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia

Alternates: Claire MacNeil, South Shore District Health Authority; Liz Millett-Isoner, Guysborough Antigonish-Strait Health Authority; Janet Knox, IWK Health Centre; Susan MacEachern, Colchester East Hants District Health Authority; Patty Dexter-Peck, Annapolis Valley District Health Authority

Support to Practising Nurses

Practising nurses need financial assistance, employer support, and professional development opportunities to keep their skills up-to-date in an ever-changing health care system. The largest portion of funding in the strategy—approximately 80 per cent—is being used to support nurses in the system.

Employers were given funding through the strategy to help cover orientation costs for nurses entering the workforce or transferring to new positions within their place of employment. A survey was conducted recently to look at existing orientation practices. Based on the results, the nursing network, in consultation with employers, drafted guidelines to ensure that nurses across the province consistently receive orientation.

Employers have also received funding for continuing education and are starting to distribute it according to the specific needs of their staff and facilities. Funds have been used to pay tuition for courses and fees for conferences, to bring in speakers, and to conduct educational in-services, seminars, and workshops.

The Department of Health also funds specialty education programs for registered nurses in critical care, peri-operative, and mental health.

On-line program brings course closer to home

While it is important to have funding for professional development, it is also important that busy nurses can access the programs.

This year, to improve access, funding from the nursing strategy was used to add a new on-line component to the peri-operative nursing program.

Typically, students of this program complete the theory component with print materials and learning labs at a clinical site. They also complete a clinical component under the supervision and guidance of experienced nurses or "preceptors."

The new on-line component features video clips to view demonstrations of procedures, a web board to post questions and have on-line group discussions, and links to relevant websites to explore the world of peri-operative nursing.

Deborah Searle, RN nurse in the OR at Soldier's Memorial Hospital in Middleton.

Denise Bowes, Nurse Educator, Provincial Post-RN Programs.

"It really enhances the learning experience," said Denise Bowes, Nurse Educator, Provincial Post-RN Courses. "Video clips of procedures help students to be better prepared when they come to learning labs and the web board lets them connect and form learner groups."

Deborah Searle, a registered nurse working in the operating room at Soldier's Memorial Hospital in Middleton, decided to take the peri-operative certificate course to reinforce her skills after time away with her family.

"The operating room changes all the time," she said. "You have new technology, new equipment, anesthesia, and medications, as well as new surgical techniques. Nurses have to adapt to a constantly changing environment."

Deborah, who graduated from the diploma school of nursing, said another benefit of taking the program is that it is recognized in a number of other provinces and can count as partial credit in a baccalaureate nursing program, if she chooses that route.

"I love the operating room and having this credential will open new doors for me," she says. "The fact that I can access the program anytime, from home or even when I'm travelling, has been an added bonus."

Denise says that's one of the most important benefits of the on-line program.

"Since adding the on-line component, we've had our highest number of students yet," she said. "There's great potential to offer more courses in this way. We can really improve accessibility province-wide."

If you are interested in knowing more about the continuing education or specialty education opportunities that are available in your organization through the nursing strategy, please contact your employer.

Support to Student Nurses

If all the nurses who graduated in this province stayed here to work, nursing vacancies would be drastically reduced. Yet the current reality is that many of the newest graduates are leaving to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Cathleen Connell and Julie Sutherland are fourth year students in the St. FX School of Nursing.

New initiatives such as co-op and bursaries provide students with valuable work experience and help to reduce their student debt load. At the same time, they improve the odds that new graduates will choose to start their career in Nova Scotia.

Last year, 60 third-year nursing students completed paid co-op work terms in various care settings all across Nova Scotia, and bursaries of $3,000 were given to 25 fourth-year students who agreed to work in the province for one year after graduation.

This spring, because of the success and high demand for those programs, 90 co-op positions and 50 bursaries of $4,000 will be available through the strategy.

Bursaries are also available for licensed practical nurses wanting to upgrade or re-enter the workforce. Because of high uptake throughout the year, the total amount available for bursaries for the LPN refresher program and pharmacy course was also increased by 50 per cent.

Many employers are contributing their own funds to add to the total number of co-op positions and bursaries available through the strategy.

Co-op encourages student nurses to stay

Cathleen Connell, a student in the St. Francis Xavier School of Nursing, completed her 10-week work term at the QEII Health Sciences Centre, VG site in the ENT unit. She describes the experience as "eye-opening."

"By my third year at school, I was apprehensive. I wondered if I'd chosen the right career. Working in a hospital with such a supportive team really increased my comfort level and confidence—qualities I need to become a nurse," said Cathleen.

"People talk about turning points. Well, working there was a career turning point for me. I just wanted to stay."

Julie Sutherland, another St. FX nursing student, did her co-op term at the Valley Regional Hospital in Kentville. She echoes many of Cathleen's sentiments about co-op.

"My preceptor was great—giving me guidance but also letting me learn on my own," says Julie. "The staff were always encouraging me to try new things and participate in different situations. They wanted me to have the best experience possible."

Julie says she would love to go back to the Valley Regional, adding that if you have a good co-op experience, you will be more inclined to want to return to the same area.

For Catherine, now in her fourth year, that has turned out to be just the case. She recently learned she will receive a bursary and will be returning to the QEII. "I'm very excited," she said. "It will be a great place to start out my career."

Information on the student co-op and bursary program for the spring of 2002 is available now through the St. FX and Dalhousie Schools of Nursing.

Alison Gravefell-Lindsay, LPN with patient John Hubers at Hillside Manor in Truro.

Bursaries help LPNs upgrade skills

Alison Gravefell-Lindsay took a nine-year hiatus from nursing because there weren't many full-time opportunities for LPNs at the time. But she says she missed nursing and was thinking about returning for a while.

At the same time, she learned about the bursaries available through the nursing strategy.

"That was a wonderful incentive. I applied for the courses and was reimbursed the amount of the bursary," says Alison. "Sometimes accessing funding can be a hassle. This was very quick and easy."

Alison accessed two bursaries, one for a refresher program and another for a pharmacy course. "The refresher helped me brush up on my skills after being away from the practice," said Alison. "Medications were something new and taking the pharmacy course has opened up a whole field for me."

Both the refresher program and the pharmacy course are delivered through the Nova Scotia Community College distance education.

"There are more opportunities for LPNs today. I'm now working full-time at a job I love," says Alison, referring to her current work at Hillside Manor in Truro. "I couldn't be happier."

Information on bursaries for the refresher program and pharmacy course for licensed practical nurses is available through the Practical Nurses Licensing Board at (902) 423-8517. ■

Enhanced Recruitment Resources

Recruiting nurses to Nova Scotia means selling our job opportunities in a highly competitive marketplace.

Funding from the strategy was used to develop professional recruitment materials, such as brochures, advertising, a display unit, and a recruitment website.

Recruitment teams, made up of nurses from different parts of the province, attended a total of four major job fairs last year including Toronto and Vancouver, as well as student fairs at St. FX and Dalhousie.

Also this year, for the first time, $5,000 relocation allowances were available to nurses moving to Nova Scotia, and over 90 nurses have used it to take permanent, full-time positions in places like Kentville, Yarmouth, Halifax-Dartmouth, Amherst, and Truro.

Selling jobs—and the Nova Scotia lifestyle

Mary Godwin, Nurse Recruiter for Capital Health Authority, attended all the nursing job fairs on behalf of the province this past year.

"The situation with nursing in Nova Scotia is not unique," she says. "It's the same everywhere in Canada, the United States, and all over the world."

With competition like it is, it's important to be in the same league as the other exhibitors, and indeed Nova Scotia's booth took second place—for both presentation and staff—at a recent job fair in Vancouver.

(L-R) Peggy MacNeil - Port Hawksebury Nursing Home; Mary Godwin - Capital Health; Edith Menzies - Annapolis Valley District Health Authority

"I think our biggest selling feature is lifestyle because it's what we're known for," says Mary. "But we also have a competitive wage and benefits package, good job opportunities, relocation allowances, and now our nursing strategy. We're holding our own."

Mary says they particularly target Maritimers who want to come home. She recounts the story of a nurse she met at the Toronto job fair who left during the 1990's, unable to find full-time work.

"This nurse was surprised to find out that there were jobs in Nova Scotia," says Mary. "That's the importance of getting out there, and making our presence known."

Catherine Flood, a nurse manager at the Dartmouth General Hospital, with Carolyn MacQuarrie (foreground) and Evelyn Gallant (back)

Job fairs are seen as a long-term investment. Many nurses who attend job fairs are not planning to leave their current positions right away, but are looking for future opportunities.

Catherine Flood is a new Nurse Manager at the Dartmouth General Hospital. Originally from England, she moved here from Toronto after visiting the Nova Scotia booth at the Toronto job fair.

"It was a move I was considering and it was good to meet someone who actually worked in Nova Scotia. I'd never been here before, but everyone told me how much they loved it," she says.

Catherine said the relocation benefits were more than she had expected and that staff helped her make an easy transition. "They were wonderful. I didn't have to do a lot of the legwork, which meant I could come right away."

Often, some time will lapse before a new recruit can start work, which adds to the difficulty of the question *–Just how many nurses do we need to recruit?*

That, says Mary, isn't easy to answer. The situation is in constant flux with nurses coming and going all the time –leaving one unit or position for another, switching to part-time, or taking maternity leave, for example.

"What I can say is that everything is moving in a very positive direction. We are continually recruiting. In fact, I have a few I'm working on right now."

To find out about current nursing opportunities, visit the provincial nursing recruitment website at www.careerbeacon.com/nursing.

Workforce Development and Utilization

While recruiting more nurses into the health care system will help resolve some of the work life issues of frontline nurses, there are also other issues related to their workplaces that need to be addressed.

Work environments that support nurses in providing quality nursing practice create healthier patient outcomes and also promote the health, safety and well-being of nurses.

The Practice Environment Collaboration Program™ (PECP) is an innovative program that lets RNs, LPNs, and their employers work together to create healthy work environments.

With funding from the nursing strategy, the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia was able to enter into a licensing agreement with the College of Nurses of Ontario. The agreement allows the college to use elements of a similar program that was successfully introduced in more than 80 agencies in Ontario.

The college is currently in the process of meeting with agencies in acute care, long-term care, and public and community health throughout Nova Scotia who may be interested in the PECP™.

Staff at Roseway Manor in Shelburne (L-R) Maureen Churchill, LPN; Sue Greenwood, RN; Sharon Gallant, RN; Gizelle Townsend, LPN; Sheila Atkinson, LPN; Debra Atwood, RN.

PECP™—Working together to address work life issues

Desire to create a better workplace, commitment to complete a process and a minimum of 10 nurses–those are the key ingredients for success with the Practice Environment Collaboration Program™ (PECP).

Julie Gregg, Member Relations and Development with the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia, will be working with organizations who wish to introduce PECP™ in their workplace. She says the program, which takes between 12 and 18 months to

complete, begins with setting up an on-site work team of RNs, LPNs and other health care professionals.

The team first identifies issues, by having all RNs and LPNs in the agency complete a 20-minute survey.

The survey allows the organization to measure key attributes in the workplace, including care delivery process, professional development systems, communications systems, and facilities and equipment. Research links these attributes to work life issues.

Based on survey results, the team sets priorities, and develops and implements an action plan.

Evaluation is also an important step in the process. After the work team has implemented the action plan, nurses are surveyed again to find out if the benefits can be sustained.

"The process can result in both short and long-term changes," says Julie. "The key is to focus on continuous quality improvements."

Sharon Callan, Director of Care at Roseway Manor, a long-term care facility in Shelburne, says the PECP™ sounds like just what her team is looking for, and has invited Julie to make a presentation to their group.

"We're challenging ourselves to move towards best practices. Our whole facility is moving in that direction," says Sharon. "We hope the program will help us develop a strategy to do that."

Sharon says her group likes the idea of working together to identify the needs of both patients and nurses, and also using teamwork to find solutions. "We're quite enthusiastic about the program and we're looking forward to learning more," she says.

Julie says nurses intuitively know many of the workplace issues the survey will reveal.

"There won't often be big surprises," says Julie. "What this process does is help to confirm and prioritize the issues, and translate them into something tangible for the work team to address."

Julie adds that while many of the issues identified by agencies in Ontario who have used the program are not "big" issues, addressing them made significant differences in the work lives of the nurses...and, ultimately in the quality of care they were able to provide.

If you would like more information on the PECP™, please contact Julie Gregg at the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia at (902) 491-9744 ext. 226.

Legislation

During the spring 2001 sitting of the Legislature, government introduced two important new pieces of legislation–the Registered Nurses Act and the Licensed Practical Nurses Act.

These two pieces of legislation support the work of the nursing strategy, particularly in the area of workforce development and utilization.

The strategy recognizes the need to explore the appropriate balance of RNs and LPNs by examining scopes of practice and ensuring that all nurses can work to their full potential.

The RN Act supports primary health care reform and improved public access to services through the licensing of nurse practitioners. The LPN Act defines, for the first time in legislation, the scope of practice of an LPN.

Both Acts also include a name change to "College", a name that more appropriately reflects the self-regulatory status of RNs and LPNs and serves to enhance public trust and respect.

The new RN Act was proclaimed on January 2, 2002. Regulations for the new LPN Act are currently being drafted and it is expected that the Act will be proclaimed in the near future. Both Acts are available at www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/legc.

Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy is available at www.gov.ns.ca/health/reports.

You will need Adobe Acrobat to view the document.

If you have questions about the strategy, please contact Barb Oke, Nursing Policy Advisor at (902) 424-5881 or okebm@gov.ns.ca.

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